

Title: Shadow Part III

Author:

The night was dark, yet the companions felt more at ease gliding under the cover of darkness than travelling in the revealing light of the sun. As the moonlight filtered through the trees the companions moved--an Elf of ice and a living shadow, their fluid motions foiling each other perfectly, each one attacking in the other's wake, leaving no survivors behind them. They parried and slashed, bit and clawed their way to Floodblest. Suddenly Lightning's ears perked up, and his attention was drawn in the direction of the Grey Company's guild hall. He began to run at a fast lope towards it, leaving Ray behind.

"Lightning, wait!" She yelled, trying desperately to catch up to him.
"What is it Lightning?"

"A scream... From the hall. Hurry!" His pace gained just as Ray caught up to him.

When they arrived at the hall they found all of their friends, faces pale and saddened. Ray turned "Rik, what happened?" "Tarion is dead." Riklaun said. "Someone or something got in the guest hall and slaughtered him. Starrbolt and Wild Wil are scouting out the area for tracks."

Lightning saw Edan and Jem Val'istar sitting on a nearby rock and lumbered over to them. He looked up into their faces with a sad look. Edan reached down and patted the animal. Lightning could tell that Edan was visibly shaken and rested his head on Edan's lap. Wild Wil wandered into the clearing with his scouting party.

"Riklaun, there is no evidence of hostile tracks in the area south of here." The rest of Wild Wil's party went over to console Edan. "If anything did get in here, it was not from the south."

"Thanks old friend." Riklaun said. Rik looked at Tizer. "I fear Starrbolt will not find anything either. Something about this attack makes me very uneasy. I will post guards through out the night."

Tizer looked around at the Elves gathered in the clearing. "Everyone, I suggest that you all go back to your homes and get some sleep. Edan, I would be honored if you and Jem would stay the night with me until this is cleared up." Edan looked up at Tizer.

"That is most generous, Lord Captain." Edan and Jem got up and went with Tizer to his home. Riklaun gathered his Bladesingers together. "Okay, Modar, you will take the first watch on the south-west, Wild Wil, I want you on the

south-east. Starr and Tadsbro watch the north-west and east. The rest of you go home and get some rest. Brisid, Songblayd, Von, and Bloodglade will take the second watch till morning."

As the Elves dispersed, Riklaun went back into the guest hall. He started looking for clues as to what could have possibly slaughtered this Elf without trace of footprints or weapon. Tarion's body was shredded as if a hundred wolves tore at his body all at once. This would be a long night indeed.

Nalynn, visibly shaken by the news of Tarion's death, turned away from the door to return to her quarters. As she began walking away from the scene, she noticed a dark shred of cloth hanging from a thistle. When she knelt to pick it up, she heard a voice behind her.

"Nalynn, did you find something?" called Brisid. Nalynn quickly secreted the cloth within her cloak and picked herself up.

"Nay, I... stumbled," she blurted out. "I'm fine."

"Okay. Get some sleep, mellon."

She nodded wordlessly and returned to her room, wondering why she hadn't turned in the cloth. Unable to sleep and frustrated by Riklaun's insistence that she not enter the quarters, she lit several lamps in her room and contemplated

the evening's events. As the birds signaled the arrival of dawn, she extinguished the candles and retired to her bed, too exhausted to think any longer. Before sleep overtook her, she murmured a prayer for their fallen comrade and for his survivors. She had barely drifted off to sleep, it seemed, when she was abruptly awakened. She looked around, trying to discover what it was that woke her.

The room was awash in an eerie glow but she could not see its source. It was then that she heard his voice. "Beloved, I have come to warn thee. The forces of evil gather once again. I can do little to protect you; it grows increasingly difficult for me to cross the great Void. Never let my ring leave your finger."

"Braldt, my husband," she whispered, "I hear, but I cannot see you." The glowing light consolidated into a long, bright strand, like a serpent. It moved toward her paling with a foreboding of tragedies to come. The strand traced the outline of her mouth, as if to caress her, and it rapidly formed a face - distorted and cruel as the silent cobra and just as deadly.

"Beloved," it hissed, "Beloved indeed. You'll never see your precious husband again brave Elven lady. And soon, I shall possess you all. You, I think I shall save until last. I want you to watch

all your friends die."

The serpent specter
wrapped itself around her
in a sordid embrace,
tongue darting from its
blackened mouth.

"Yessssss, pretty Elf
Lady, you and cursed
Riklaun will be my final
prizes. How I relish the
suffering you are destined
to endure."

Nalynn awoke with a
start, heart pounding,
drenched in sweat at the
horrid vision. The room
was empty, and morning
still far. "Braldt! Oh
Corellon, I am lost
without him!" she moaned,
as she brushed the tears
of fear from her eyes.